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THE NATURE OF SOCIOLOGY.

RECENT writings under the title of Sociology are noteworthy as attempts to define a new science. They are also noteworthy for the diversity of their conclusions. Some of these conclusions fall wide apart. In one view sociology is preliminary to the special social sciences; while in another view it is comprehensive of the subject-matter of all of these sciences. In the presence of this lack of any general agreement as to its proper province, there still appears to be need of elementary inquiries concerning the class of phenomena with which it deals.

It would not require great boldness to make a somewhat positive statement concerning the proper sphere of the sociologist's activity, since those who wear this title are not agreed among themselves either as to the nature or the province of their subject.¹ Their zeal, however, is noteworthy, particularly in getting a name. There does not seem to be a great disagreement among them on this point. They only disagree when the question of the meaning of the name is raised. It might, perhaps, be said that the multitude of recent writings under the title of sociology indicates a widespread expectation that a new science is to be created, and also the desire on the part of a large number of persons to be counted among the founders. A reason for this remarkable activity is found, moreover, partly in the fact that neither economics nor politics has hitherto cultivated the whole field which belongs to it, and that consequently there has seemed to be an unoccupied realm of social facts ready to be subjected to new scientific laws. But the most important consideration which has been influential in stimulating the line of thought that has found expression in recent writings on sociology is undoubtedly the impression that previous social studies have not had the desired practical effect; the impression that it is not

¹ See *Annals of the American Academy*, September 1894, pp. 112-121.

enough to formulate and establish the laws of economics and politics, and that as a result of the accumulation of social facts and of the thought devoted to their explanation there ought to be observed more immediate and more important signs of social betterment. It has been seen that although the economists have reached certain conclusions which cannot be controverted, yet a large part of the propagandist activity of this country is devoted at present to maintaining and advocating views which flatly contradict some of the most definitely established principles of economics, and are not only without a rational basis, but also in many cases have been tried and shown to be attended with disastrous consequences. Some propositions concerning money have been settled in such a form as to be acceptable to all persons who have brought careful training and unprejudiced minds to the consideration of the subject. But at present questions relating to money are considered by a large part of the nation as if we had behind us neither reason nor experience. Another phase of modern misdirected propagandism is seen in the objections to the practice of paying interest. In spite of the fact that the continued payment of interest is necessary to prevent the wage-receiver's condition from deteriorating, a large part of the laborers of this country are advocates of the abolition of interest.

In view of these and other conspicuous failures of sound doctrine to reach the bulk of the people there has been developed that wide range of investigations which, in spite of their diversity, have been brought together under the title of sociology. One of the newest contributions is *An Introduction to the Study of Society*, by PROFESSOR A. W. SMALL and MR. GEORGE E. VINCENT. So far as the title is concerned the book stands on safe ground; for almost any knowledge in any field may be construed as introductory to the study of society. But the description of the book as "a guide to the elementary study of sociology" plunges the authors at once into the necessity of defining sociology. After they have finished this part of their undertaking, any reader ought to be able to find at least one definition to suit him.

He finds that "sociology is a science less than fifty years old," having "entered the ranks of the sciences by turning from opinion to precise examination of social facts" (p. 25). It is also "the philosophy of human welfare," "not a substitute for knowledge about the phases of nature and of society upon which particular sciences are employed," "but is subsequent to all these sciences, and dependent upon them" (p. 32). Its primary function is "the correlation of existing knowledge about society," with the view of "bringing the results together into an exposition of society as a whole" (p. 54). The practical character of sociology appears when it is seen that it "was born of the modern ardor to improve society" (p. 77), and that its special work is "organizing social knowledge of all kinds into a body of wisdom available as a basis for deliberate social procedure" (p. 55). In comparison with the practical plans of the socialists it "is no less profoundly devoted to social welfare, but it assumes that progress will be accelerated more surely by patient search for yet unknown facts and relations, and by gradual social assimilation of knowledge, than by artificial reconstruction" (p. 77). And the practical social problem which, in the view of our authors, it is the purpose of sociology to solve is not merely to determine "the ways and means by which the lot of the laboring classes may be improved," but rather to inquire "what is the best that the human race can live for," and "learn what influences are available to secure the best of life for the greatest number" (p. 77). According, therefore, to these definitions, sociology appears at once as a science, a philosophy, and an art.

The statements affirming the extreme comprehensiveness of sociology leave the reader in doubt concerning the method to be employed and the exact nature of the results to be reached. "Sociology," we are told, "is the synthesis of all that has been learned about society, as it has been, and as it is, in its structure and in its essence" (p. 67). As descriptive sociology it appears here as "the organization of all the positive knowledge of man and of society furnished by the sciences and sub-sciences now designated or included under the titles Biology, Anthropol-

ogy, Psychology, Ethnology, Demography, History, Political and Economic Science, and Ethics" (p. 62). As statical sociology it "is a synthesis of antecedent sciences" (p. 67). Hitherto it has been difficult to find expressions of this synthesis meriting recognition as scientific laws, and definite statements in this matter by our authors reveal an immediately practical purpose. "Descriptive sociology attempts to combine the testimony of these special sciences into a revelation of the accidental and the permanent factors in social combinations, and thus of the forces to be taken into calculation in all doctrines or policies of social progress." Statical sociology reaches "conclusions about wastes in the operations of society," while "dynamical sociology proceeds to investigate means of employing all the available forces of society in the interest of the largest human welfare" (p. 70). In so far as any purpose is here clearly revealed it is a practical purpose. Advances from the general statement that sociology is based on, and comprehends the several social sciences, to definite and particular statements, are likely to result, on the one hand, in generalizations on the facts of the historical movement in the past, and, on the other hand, in a body of precepts indicating what should be the movement of society in the future. These generalizations are a part of history, inasmuch as they constitute an explanation of what has been the movement of society, which it is the function of history to set forth. The precepts belong to the art of social control, in which our knowledge of the forces revealed in society finds expression in conscious efforts to direct social movements in the future. There may arise no objection to designating this last field as the proper province of sociology.

The second book of the volume in hand presents an admirable account of the growth of a community, from the settlement of the first farmer to the establishment of a city. The sketch is typical of the social development in some parts of the interior of this country, where the settlers have had to rely upon agriculture for subsistence. It has little if any reference to the growth of society where communities have had their origin in mining

camps or in ports tributary to them. This is called the natural history of a society, and there seems to be no good reason for giving sketches like this any other name. To call them sociology or a part of sociology, instead of history, gives them no new scientific or practical value. The new name does not make us understand any better what has happened in the processes by which a city has arisen in the wilderness. To understand these events which are presented to us in history, our first step is to classify them. The beginnings of one class we find in the earliest recognition or manifestation of civil or public authority, and it is the function of political science to present the individual events of this class in such ordered form that their significance at any period, and the part they have played in the development of society, will readily appear to the mind. The other social sciences deal in like manner with the other classes of events. And thus, on the basis of the natural synthesis under which the mind grasps the events in the experience of the race if it grasps them at all, we prepare for that rational synthesis of scientific conclusions on which we rely for the intelligent guidance of society.

The other books, the third, the fourth, and the fifth, deal respectively with Social Anatomy, Social Physiology and Pathology, and Social Psychology. They are written, for the greater part, with remarkable clearness, and contain an abundance of interesting suggestions. They reveal, however, the disadvantage under which one must necessarily labor in writing a text-book of a science before the proper province of that science has been determined. As indicated by the terms employed, the authors raise again the delusive analogy between society and the human body; and whenever this is done there is always danger of mistaking an established analogy for the statement of a law, a danger that is not entirely avoided in the volume under consideration. In the grouping of facts here set forth, regard has not always been had to the essential principles of scientific classification. Instead of gathering social facts into homogeneous groups according as they illustrate certain clearly defined relations, such as economical or political relations, the purpose here seems to have

been to make such groups of facts as, when presented, would describe particular institutions or "social aggregates." Under this method the phenomena brought together in any given group are not necessarily of the same kind, and the groups thus constructed are consequently of no special importance for logical purposes. They are such groups as arise from that form of analysis which is involved in a description of any given social institution. The method here involved does not lead us far towards general scientific truth, but furthers minute description. It gives us a picture of society, with all its details clearly visible, but it does not reveal the laws which underlie its being.

This part of the volume in question sets before us in their natural grouping the facts of social life, and is thus a valuable supplement to the ordinary historical narrative. It lays before us many of the facts which the ordinary descriptions of society omit; and thus renders an important service to the several social sciences in placing within their view, for classification and scientific examination, a wide range of social phenomena. It is in this regard that this "Introduction to the Study of Society" is valuable, rather than for any definite laws of social organization or social action which it presents. The few attempts to formulate such laws, worthy of the italics in which they have been printed, cannot be considered as strikingly successful. Under the heading: Certain Laws of Social Psychology, we find two that have attained this distinction. The first is: "*At any given moment, the psychical force of society, together with the efficiency of the psychophysical mechanism, is a fixed quantity.*" It is not to be presumed that anybody will attempt to controvert this proposition. If at any moment there is an amount of psychical force in society, it goes without saying that that amount is a certain or fixed amount, although we may have no means of determining how great the amount is. It is a perfectly safe proposition because it is a truism, but it cannot be said to have any far-reaching scientific importance. The second italicized law is that, "*Social psychical energy cannot long be concentrated upon one object.*" This is not a truism; in fact it does not appear to be true. It may be a fact that the

great purposes of society in its onward movement frequently rise into the consciousness of individuals, and as frequently disappear; yet if there is one striking fact in history it is the fact of the persistence of social purpose. The conscious designs of the individual members of society may be as unstable as the wind, generation may succeed generation; yet, in spite of the fluctuations of individual opinion, the "social psychical energy" moves with remarkable persistence towards the realization of social purposes; and the great achievements in the social progress of the world are the fruit of this persistence, whether the achievement is the reform of the English Parliament, the foundation of the German Empire, or the elevation of slaves and serfs to the rank of independent citizens of a commonwealth.

This book is not likely to set aside any hitherto existing necessity of inquiries into the sphere and nature of sociology, nor to allay the very general dissatisfaction with the somewhat limited results that have already been achieved in the scientific treatment of social phenomena. That such dissatisfaction exists in this matter is manifest in the critical character of present inquiries, in the disposition to revise old theories, and in the readiness with which the advocates of new methods and new schools of social inquiry obtain a hearing. With reference to economics, dissatisfaction with attained results manifests itself in a partial abandonment of discussions concerning theory, in favor of a minute investigation of the facts of economic history. This dissatisfaction is seen, moreover, in the disposition here and there shown to transform economics from a body of scientific principles, or laws, into a body of laws and precepts, or of scientific conclusions and practical advice; in a word, to repudiate the tendency observable in the history of economics to discriminate between a scientific law and its application to affairs. In this spirit there is encouragement to the production of treatises on society which consider it exclusively neither from the point of view of science nor of art, and which are not limited to any clearly defined class of social phenomena. Involving the whole

realm of social facts, and disregarding necessary lines of classification, such treatises have certain characteristics of individual programmes for reforming the world. It is only natural that persons moved by the zeal of reformers should be desirous of having all thought on economical and political questions turned immediately to the improvement of social conditions, and thus become impatient of what they regard as the non-practical character of the social sciences. But after all it may not be necessary, in order to reach the desired end, hopelessly to mingle law and precept, and to disregard the lines of distinction between the accepted classes of social phenomena. And it does not appear that by this means the rate of our progress towards practical solutions will be increased.

The slowness of the advance which civilized society has made towards an understanding of itself has not been entirely due to a lack of intellectual force, but in a large measure to a lack of intellectual freedom. The ecclesiastical prepossessions of earlier centuries made thought about society necessarily sterile; but at present we pretend to expect important results from the intellectual emancipation of this age. It may be a fact that in certain quarters there has come a measure of freedom from ecclesiastical domination, but at the same time there has come a more or less powerful domination of thought by material interests; and it has not been shown that the domination of material interests in the present is less exacting than was the domination of religious interests in an earlier period.

This lack of freedom has stood in the way not only of reaching scientific conclusions regarding the phenomena of society, but it has also stood in the way of adopting proper and efficient rules of practical conduct. Men have had information about society, but under the influence of a preconceived theory, or in the service of certain material interests, their minds have been disposed to present this information so as to make it fit the preconception, or support the material interests concerned. In solving either the scientific or the practical problems presented by the facts of social life, the thought whose expression is important is that

which proceeds from minds unmortgaged. Whoever speaks merely for a party gives utterance to thoughts which have become the common possession of many persons. He is in some sense an intellectual middleman. He gets his wares from the producers, and, carrying them from one public place to another, distributes them wherever he thinks they will be received. He has unquestionably an important part in the practical affairs of society; but he must be distinguished from the investigator of social phenomena, whose purpose is to discover and state about society some hitherto unstated truth. Somewhat akin to this distinction is that which may be drawn between the propounder of a scientific law governing a certain class of social phenomena, and him who would make a practical application of this law. These two persons stand for two phases of activity, the scientific and the practical.

In view of the relation between scientific and practical purposes, the conclusion has been hastily adopted that whenever facts of a special class lend themselves to scientific treatment there must be found a distinct corresponding art. Admitting the existence of a science of economics and a science of politics, some recent writers appear to have made the easy inference that there is a distinct art of economics and a distinct art of politics; and that the art in these cases holds the same relation to the sciences named that the art of chemistry holds to the science of chemistry. An error in this inference arises from a failure to observe that the purely scientific conclusions of economics are not applied practically, except as modified by the conclusions of ethics and politics; or that the scientific conclusions of politics may not be applied practically, except as modified by the conclusions of economics and ethics.

If the problem in politics is to determine in general what means are efficient in maintaining an absolute ruler in power, an induction from the history of absolutism indicates, as such means, the extermination of the family of the preceding dynasty, disarming by flattery or crushing with firmness all persons who are disposed to be independent and ambitious. The unmistak-

able induction from the facts of absolute rule is a law of deception or severity ; but it is not expected, in a society aiming at the highest standard of civilization, that this law shall be directly applied, although it is supported not only by the facts of early tyrannies, but also by the history of absolutism in later times. The long reign of Dr. Francia in Paraguay illustrates exactly this law. We may be compelled to acknowledge that these means and others like them are the only efficient means for maintaining absolute rule ; but to carry out this law by applying these means would bring us immediately into conflict with the principles of morals and economics, or the purposes of the moral and economic life. In our practical efforts to direct the affairs of civilized society we discover that the development of our highest social existence is incompatible with the purposes involved in absolute rule. The line of action leading to this highest form of social existence is the resultant of the suggestions contained in the moral, political, and economic laws, and is very different from the end or purpose indicated by the laws of any one of these sciences taken by itself. It thus appears that purely scientific inductions may be drawn from classes of the historical facts of society, but that they may not be applied practically as we apply the inductions from the several classes of facts in the realm of nature, where we have to do simply with unmoral matter. Inasmuch as they concern moral beings in intercourse with one another they are applied only as modified by, or in connection with, conclusions drawn from other classified phenomena of social life. Out of this arises the necessity of recognizing a complex art of social control, in which we apply no one set of laws or principles. If we apply the principles of politics, it is in connection with moral and economic principles ; or our economic conduct is checked by moral and political considerations. This may be illustrated by our different attitude in different cases of changing prices.

It may be observed that the price of labor, the price of the use of capital, and the price of all other commodities, follow essentially the same general law ; yet our practical conduct is not the same

when the price of labor falls toward zero as when the price of the use of capital falls toward the same point. When the price of labor falls to zero my neighbor stands on the verge of starvation, and under the dictation of the laws of morals I violate the economic presupposition of maximum gains, and divide with him my day's income. On the other hand, when the interest on a certain portion of capital falls to zero my neighbor may cease to be a capitalist and become a laborer, yet in this case I am not moved by any moral duty or political consideration to rescue him from the consequences of economic forces. Again, if the economist holds, as a law of production, that the maximum gains will be had under freedom, when each individual is allowed to go in the line of his greatest productive ability, it does not follow that, participating in the practical management of affairs, he will demand a strict application of this law. The freedom of buying and selling, of making and importing, is interrupted at many points on grounds higher than mere economic expediency. However thoroughly convinced one may be that under freedom the greatest total gains will be realized, still in his practical action he may stand stoutly for restriction, disregarding the law of maximum economic gains, for the sake of some superior political or moral advantage.

Proceeding by this line of thought, we reach the conclusion that it is not possible to recognize in the practical affairs of society a distinct art of economics or a distinct art of politics, but one comprehensive art of social control, which takes note of the scientific conclusions drawn from the several classes of social phenomena, and on the basis of these determines practical action.

It is not affirmed that all possible scientific conclusions have been drawn from the observed and classified facts of social life; nor can it be said with truth that all possible scientific conclusions have been drawn from the observed and classified facts of nature; yet in either case we have a sufficient number of unquestioned laws to furnish a basis for a safe practical action. We have a sufficient knowledge of the laws of combustion to be able

to see clearly that the careless throwing of lighted matches in a powder mill is not approved practical conduct. We have a knowledge of the general laws of economics and politics, which, if fully brought into use, is quite adequate to suggest a fairly safe line of action. The question of importance at present is how to make use of this knowledge, how to employ what we know to be the undisputed laws of morals, politics, and economics in determining the practical control of social affairs. If a way has not already been found for giving this knowledge practical efficiency, there is in this fact no reason for departing from strictly logical methods in the purely scientific investigation of social facts, or for returning to the unfounded utterances of sentimentalism. If the last hundred years of economic and political study have given us certain accepted laws concerning social order and activity, the recognition of these laws as the basis of action constitutes the possible difference between our practice and that of a century ago, and the possible advantage in our favor.

In view, however, of the failure of our public practice to correspond with our knowledge of the social principles which ought to determine it, the most immediate and imperative need of the present appears to be, not a further refinement of the theories of the social sciences, but the organization and perfection of social practice. Hitherto we have proceeded on the supposition that agents adequate to this undertaking were found in our legislative bodies. It has been assumed that municipal, state, and national legislators would have knowledge of the principles of social order and progress, in a word, a knowledge of the principles of economics and politics and ethics, and would formulate a course of practical action in harmony with these principles. This is, in fact, the purpose for which legislative assemblies are convened. They are not expected to engage extensively in the work of scientific investigation, but on the basis of ascertained knowledge to set forth rules for the guidance of society. Attempts to realize these expectations have encountered obstacles. Some of these are observed in the willingness of legislators, in order to

continue their party in power, to make concessions to the infirmities of the people. The will of the people, even of the people with infirmities, has unquestionably a legitimate function in determining certain lines of public activity. But there are phases of the public administration so entirely dependent on technical knowledge as to furnish no proper field for the exercise of the popular will in its present state of enlightenment. Certain phases of questions concerning money fall clearly within this description. And he who stands in his place in a legislative assembly, apprehending this fact, and bases his decision concerning such a question on the prejudices of the uninstructed fails in his duty as a statesman. Yet this humiliating spectacle has become so familiar as to make on us almost no impression. In this we discover one of the obstacles to forming and carrying out a rational art of social control.

If we were to ask expert economists to settle the practical questions which, one after another, crowd themselves forward for solution, or to frame the precepts of a social art, we might avoid the obstacles which the experience of the legislator has revealed, but we should encounter almost equally insurmountable obstacles in the limited and often one-sided knowledge of the economists. As already suggested, the lines of social action must be drawn not only in the light of economic truth, but also in the light of political and moral truth; and it does not appear that the economists may be relied upon to furnish the necessary breadth of illumination. Their special knowledge is undoubtedly of great importance in practical affairs, but only in connection with the wisdom of the moralist and the conclusions of the political philosopher may it properly serve as a basis of conduct.

Perhaps the most hopeful attempt to reach the practical solutions which we seek is that which certain universities are at present making through a department of instruction and investigation known as the department of social science, or sociology. But it may happen that the result will not coincide with present expectations. It is possible that the expected science will not appear. Out of the minute investigations into present social

conditions and their causes, out of the zeal and the thought of the many cultivated men whose attention is directed to the study of society, we have every reason to believe there will come important contributions to an improved social art.

If the so-called social science is indeed a science it must deal in a scientific manner with the economical, the ethical, or the political relations of men, or with all of these relations taken together. Observing that classification is the first step in scientific activity, the economist has gathered the economical facts or phenomena of society, and subjected them to the logical treatment necessary to the development of a science. In like manner the sciences of ethics and politics have been constructed on the basis of the ethical and political phenomena of society; and, like the science of economics, they consider the appropriate facts of social life, whether they appear in the earliest phases of society or in the last stages of social enlightenment. The first meeting of two savages to exchange their primitive wares is a fact which economics takes account of, as well as the facts which make up the business life of a great nation. And the science of politics embraces in its data the earliest exercise of a leader's power over his tribe or followers, as well as the relations of political superiority and subordination which appear in the civilized world of the present. And the data of ethics are equally comprehensive of the moral facts and relations of society in the whole course of its history.

After having gathered these three orders of facts or relations into three several classes there seems to be very little left on which to build a science worthy of the comprehensive and magnificent name of the science of society. There is clearly no field here for the construction of a science under this title, which may be regarded as co-ordinate with economics and politics. There is, moreover, no field in the social phenomena of primitive life; for economical and political relations are as easily distinguished here as in any phase of civilization. Nor may sociology seek a footing in the minor and local organizations of society; for wherever these organizations are the instruments for the

exercise of public power, or are corporations existing under the state's laws of incorporation, they are unmistakably within the proper field of politics. And even the family, in so far as it is not taken account of as a part of the natural history of man, exists and is determined in its character by the laws of the state, and thus the facts presented by its legal relations constitute a part of the data of the science of politics.

Driven from this field those who are laboring to construct a science of sociology have proposed to make it extend over all the social phenomena of these several classes at once. This project may be likened to an attempt to obliterate the lines of distinction between the several sciences of nature. The movement of these later years is not in that direction, but in the exactly opposite direction, and is going forward with marvelous rapidity. And what has happened in the realm of nature is happening in the realm of society; the process of the differentiation of the sciences dealing with social phenomena has gone forward; and at present there seems to be no more probability of establishing a comprehensive science embracing all the facts, or phenomena, of society than there is of establishing a comprehensive science embracing all the facts, or phenomena, of nature.

Although it may be true that sociology deals with society generally, yet its purpose does not appear to be scientific, but practical. On the basis of scientific knowledge already formulated, or yet to be formulated, it indicates the lines of social action. If, as sometimes asserted, it comprehends economics and politics and ethics, it is in such form that the laws pertaining to these sciences are joined to furnish the basis of rules of action in social affairs. In this view, the "sociological synthesis" is a union of the scientific conclusions of the several social sciences to constitute the basis of an art, not an art of economics, nor an art of politics, but the general art of social control; and the development of this art appears to be the field open to those who call themselves sociologists.

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